

COMMUNICATING AS A FAMILY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

COVID-19 and sheltering in place is causing stress and uncertainty for families. During crises such as this, using communication skills can help to reduce tension at home.

Expressing Positive Feelings Use to set the stage for calm communications and lower conflict

Be specific about what you liked: Emphasize the positive behavior only
Share how the behavior made you feel to make it more reinforcing
Use non-verbals: Eye contact, physical affection

"I'm proud of you for staying focused on your math work!"

Tips

Younger kids: Simple language, enthusiastic
Older kids: More complex language and calm, sincere tone
5:1 Ratio: Five positive interactions for every one negative interaction

"Thank you for giving your sibling a turn. It makes me so happy to see you share!"

"I feel so loved when you make drawings for me!"

I-Statements to Express Negative Feelings Use to increase chances you'll be heard and reduce chances of defensive response

"I Feel": State how the behavior made you feel
"When You": Describe the specific behavior you did not like

"I feel..."

State how their behavior made you feel

- Sad
- Hurt
- Disappointed
- Let down

"When you..."

Focus on the specific behavior

- Played video games instead of doing schoolwork
- Called your sibling a name
- Hit

Active Listening Use to prevent disagreements from escalating

Pay attention: Focus on what your child is saying
Show you are listening: Eye contact, nod, say "mmm-hmm"
Ask clarifying questions
Summarize what you heard



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Validation

Use to de-escalate and connect when your child is distressed

1. Label the emotion
2. Use receptive, non-judgmental body language and tone
3. Communicate their emotions make sense and you're taking them seriously, even if you don't agree with the behavior
4. After you have validated, then you can encourage problem solving if appropriate and if your child is ready or offer support

"It makes sense that you're disappointed about graduation being canceled"

Younger kids: Redirect or suggest solutions

Older kids: Include them in problem solving or discuss ways to cope

Problem Solving

Use to solve problems, especially problems that come up over and over or large problems

Follow the STEPPS

- S** **Say the Problem:** Identify the problem and use active listening to understand all perspectives
- T** **Think of Solutions:** Brainstorm without judging
- E** **Evaluate:** Pros and cons of each solution
- P** **Pick:** Choose a solution
- P** **Plan:** Figure out how you will carry out the solution
- S** **See if it Works:** Use the solution. If it doesn't work, return to "P" and pick another

Please remember: you are doing the best you can! This is a tough time filled with change and new roles. It is not possible to have "perfect" communication, but using more of these skills can help ease tensions.

Additional Resources

Online Webinars

Talking to Young People about COVID-19, Positive Parenting During Shelter in Place, and more!
<https://med.stanford.edu/cme/COVID19/education.html>

Tips for talking to kids about COVID-19, strategies to manage stress, and more resources
<https://med.stanford.edu/elspap.html>

Connect and Recharge Groups:

Includes Positive Parenting Special Topic Groups
<https://med.stanford.edu/psychiatry/special-initiatives/crgroups.html>